DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 928 IR 053 276

AUTHOR Buckley, Jonathan; And Others
TITLE Question Negotiation at Orem Public Library.
PUB DATE 9 Apr 90
NOTE 52p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Policy; *Communication Skills; Evaluation Criteria; *Job Performance; Organizational Objectives; *Personnel Evaluation; *Public Libraries; *Reference Services; Referral; Retraining; User Needs (Information); *User Satisfaction (Information)
IDENTIFIERS Orem Public Library UT; *Query Negotiation (Library Science); Unobtrusive Measures

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this unobtrusive study of reference services at Orem (Utah) Public Library was to determine the extent to which reference questions were negotiated, the appropriateness of the verbal and nonverbal communication skills used, and the extent of influence those skills and levels of negotiation had on the accuracy of the answer given. Proxy library users conducted a total of 60 reference transactions within a 2-week period using assigned negotiation questions, each with three levels that the librarians had to negotiate in order to get to the real information need. Analysis of the data showed that 53.3% of the negotiation transactions were negotiated to the real information need, and of those that were fully negotiated, 78.1% received the correct answer. Nonverbal skills were used over 90% of the time, but were not serious indicators of the correct answers. All verbal skills were better indicators of receiving the correct answer, the best indicators being the use of appropriate open questions and the use of follow-up. (14 references) (Author/SD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED322928

Brigham Young University

Question Negotiation at Orem Public Library

A Report Submitted to
Dr. Marsha Broadway
In Partial Fulfillment of
L.I.S. 696 Requirements

School of Library and Information Science

By

Jonathan Buckley
Sheri Orth
Thomas Ricks

Provo, Utah
9 April 1990

IR053276

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Sheri Orth
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Author: Jonathan Buckley, Sheri Orth, Thomas Ricks

Title: Question Negotiation at Orem Public Library

Abstract:

The purpose of this unobtrusive study of reference service at Orem (Utah) Public Library was to determined the extent to which reference questions were negotiated, the appropriateness of the verbal and non-verbal communication skills used, and the extent of influence those skills and levels of negotiation had on the accuracy of the answer given. Proxy library users conducted a total of 60 reference transactions within a two week period using assigned negotiation questions, each with three levels that the librarian had to negotiate in order to get to the real information need. Analysis of the data showed that 53.3 percent of the negotiation transactions were negotiated to the real information need, and of those that were fully negotiated, 78.1 percent received the correct answer. Non-verbal skills were used over 90 percent of the time, but were not serious indicators of the correct answers. All verbal skills were better indicators of receiving the correct answer, the best indicators being the use of appropriate open questions and the use of follow-up .

053276

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have contributed to the research and writing of this research report. The authors would like to acknowledge the help of the following individuals:

Dr. Marsha Broadway for instructing us in the correct methods of writing, research, and methodology, and for being patient in giving suggestions and working through group dynamics.

Both the Accuracy/Referral and the User Study groups for helping to gather data and giving us support and encouragement.

Bruce Westergren for helping to gather the research material and write the review of the literature.

Xanthe Farnworth for being the mediator between the LIS 696 students and the Orem Public Library.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS. iii

LIST OF TABLES v

INTRODUCTION 1

Research Goal

Importance of the Study

Research Questions

Subsidiary Questions

Assumptions

Definitions

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 7

Reference Models

Unobtrusive Testing

Summary

3. METHODOLOGY 12

Population

Data Collection Procedures

Instruments

Limitations of the Study

Methodological Assumptions

4. ANALYSIS OF DATA 18

Level Reached in the Negotiation Process

Negotiation Level by Accuracy

Nonverbal Skills by Accuracy

Verbal Skills by Accuracy

Commentary Provide by Library Proxy Users

Summary

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. 24

Procedures

Results

Recommendations

Suggestions for Improving Present Study

Suggestions for Further Research

Appendix 29

A. Proxy Instructions

B. Negotiation Questionnaire

C. Negotiation Questions

D. Question Asignment Matrix

BIBLIOGRAPHY 45

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Level Reached in Negotiation Process 18

2. Negotiation Level by Accuracy. 19

3. Nonverbal Skills by Accuracy 20

4. Verbal Skills by Accuracy. 22

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The public library has often been called the "community university," where the public has free access to information. An important part of acquiring information from a library is reference service. A reference librarian has the critical role of bringing the information and the library user together. Several barriers stand in the way of effective reference service, such as distracting non-verbal skills and poor communication on the part of the reference librarians. Another obstacle in effective reference service is the library user who is unable to state his or her question in a coherent manner. Librarians need to practice negotiation techniques to get to the real information needs of the library user and to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Research Goal

The goal of this unobtrusive measurement at Orem Public Library (OPL) was to determine the extent to which reference questions were negotiated, the appropriateness of the verbal and non-verbal communication skills used, and the extent of influence those skills and levels of negotiation had on accuracy.

Importance of the Study

This study measured the negotiation techniques used by the Orem Public Library reference librarians. The study established a baseline for comparison for the negotiation skills/accuracy relationship so that future studies similar to this one can be compared to determine trends in reference service. It may be helpful to library administrators at Orem Public Library by determining which negotiation skills effectively get to the real information need and which of these skills was not being used effectively by librarians. The study also helped in deciding what steps needed to be implemented in order to improve the negotiation techniques used by the reference librarians.

Research Questions

The statement of the problems addressed in this study was phrased as research questions and are stated below:

1. How frequently do the staff at Orem Public Library negotiate reference questions to the real information need?
2. How frequently do fully negotiated questions receive correct answers?
3. What verbal and nonverbal negotiation skills lead to correct answers?

Subsidiary Questions

<u>Nonverbal Skills</u>

1. How frequently do proxy library users perceive the reference librarians at Orem Public Library to be approachable?

2. How frequently do proxy library users perceive that the librarians use appropriate eye contact?
3. How frequently do proxy library users perceive that the librarians use distracting gestures?
4. How frequently do proxy library users perceive that the librarians use appropriate facial expressions and appropriate posture?

Verbal Skills

5. How frequently do proxy library users perceive that the librarians prematurely diagnose their information needs?
6. How frequently do the librarians remember the information needs of proxy library users?
7. How frequently do the librarians ask appropriate open questions as perceived by proxy library users?
8. How frequently do the librarians restate or paraphrase reference questions to verify that the information need was understood?
9. How frequently do the librarians use follow-up techniques to encourage proxy library users to ask for more assistance if their information needs are not met?

Assumptions

Appropriate and effective reference negotiation skills, both verbal and non-verbal, are essential to identifying the real informational needs of library users. Furthermore, these skills will lead the correct answers.

Definitions

Correct Answer - the answer and information source that is both predetermined and verified by the negotiation group and sought for by the proxy library user.

Full Negotiation - the point in the negotiation process at which the OPL reference librarian understands the library user's actual information need.

Information Need - information being sought by proxy library user concerning a particular fact or circumstance, etc.

Negotiation Question - request by the proxy library user that involves a three-level negotiation process to get the real information need of the proxy library user.

Level one - introductory statement made by the proxy library user towards the real information need.

Level two - second stage negotiation statement made by the proxy library user towards the real information need.

Level three - final statement made by the proxy library user which reveals the real information need.

Non-Verbal Communication - communication that is not verbal used by the reference librarian during the negotiation process. Non-verbal communication was judged subjectively by the proxy library user as being either appropriate or inappropriate. The non-verbal communication variables that were studied were:

Approachability - librarian's initial acknowledgement of the patron's presence through positive movement, eye contact, facial expressions, and posture as perceived subjectively by

the proxy library user during initial contact at the reference desk.

Distracting Gestures - gestures used by OPL reference librarians during negotiation process perceived by proxy library users as distracting to the negotiation process; for example nail biting, hair twisting, pencil tapping, etc.

Eye Contact - librarian's ability to make and maintain eye contact that was comfortable for the proxy library user throughout the interview.

Facial Expressions - facial empathy which reflected interest in the information need of the library user, such as nodding, smiling, frowning, etc.

Relaxed Posture - body movements that lend themselves to successful reference transaction, such as slightly leaning forward and facing the patron.

Proxy Library User - a person in the Winter semester 1990 LIS 696 class who asked the OPL reference librarians questions and completed the negotiation questionnaire according to proxy instructions.

Reference Librarian - all information staff, part time, full time, or volunteer, who staff the information desk and provide information service at OPL.

Reference Negotiation - the encounter between the proxy library user and reference librarian from the time the initial question was asked, a response was given, dialogue was terminated, and the user left either satisfied or unsatisfied.

SPSS/PC+ Studentware - statistical software package used in analyzing data.

Verbal Communication - communication by means of language used by the OPL reference librarian during the negotiation process which was studied objectively. The verbal communication variables that were studied were:

Follow-Up - statement given by the OPL reference librarian which encouraged proxy library user to indicate whether or not the provided information met the information need. Example: "Does this answer your question?" or "If you need additional information, please let me know."

Open Question - question that allowed for dialogue that required the proxy library user to respond with more than a "yes" or a "no" answer. Typically begins with what, why, how, etc.

Paraphrasing - communication technique that involved restating to the proxy library user what he or she had said to clarify potential misunderstandings.

Premature Diagnosis - assumptions made by the OPL reference librarians about the proxy library user and/or the information need before the proxy library user had given all necessary information.

Remembering - the ability of the OPL reference librarian to remember important statements during the negotiation process, such as relevant dates, time periods, names of people, places, and other pertinent information.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Evaluating reference service has become a popular topic in the library world. An ever increasing number of reports and studies uncover several reference models and methods of unobtrusive reference evaluation.

Reference Models

Models explaining the nature of transactions at the reference desk and the librarian's efforts to correctly determine a library user's information needs have developed fairly recently in library literature. One of the earliest attempts to create a formal theory was made by Bernard Vavrek (1968, 1974). The essential elements of Vavrek's theory are the informational environment, where the transaction takes place; the inquirer (source); the inquiry itself (message); and the librarian (receiver). In a one-way transfer of information, the inquirer transmits his message to the receiver, which results in getting the information the inquirer needs. Vavrek's model, however, lacks any two-way, interactive method for allowing the librarian to determine the patron's true information needs through questions and discussion and following up to see if those needs have been properly satisfied. Nonetheless, it was a step in the right direction.

Two of the more prominent theories were created by James Rettig (1978) and Jahoda, Braunagel, and Nath (1977).

The Rettig model starts with the approach of the library user to the information desk and the presentation of the initial information request; the librarian's attempt to determine the true information need through asking a series of questions, progressing from the more general to the most specific; the library user's responses to those questions; and the final identification of the necessary source (or sources) that satisfy the library user's needs. The Jahoda model also begins with the approach of the library user to the desk, the initial information request, the query negotiation, and selection of tools based on the negotiated question. This model was presented in greater detail in Jahoda and Brunagel (1980, 129-139). It discusses the importance of using open questions, paraphrasing, and the use of non-verbal skills.

Other discussions of the reference process have been largely on the descriptive level, emphasizing techniques for assisting the library user to determine his needs rather than on theory. One such study was published by Geraldine B. King in 1972. Applying the earlier work of Robert Taylor (1968) and making special use of his "five filters" (determination of the subject; objective and motivation of the inquirer; personal characteristics of the inquirer; relationship of inquiry description to file organization, and anticipated or acceptable answers) to help structure the interview, she suggested dividing the interview roughly into two parts: encouraging the user to talk about his information request

and following up the library user's statements with analyzing and translating his request into the library's organizations of information. Within this overall structure, King suggested using open and closed questions to help move the library user from his general want to his specific information need.

William Katz extended this view by stressing the importance of the role of the librarian in the interview (1987, 2:39-58). Of primary importance was the atmosphere the librarian created for the library user and their efforts to make the library patron feel comfortable and willing to discuss his problem. He emphasized the librarian's approachability (smiling, looking relaxed, listening, responding positively to the patron on a nonverbal level) and his or her dress. He then discussed the use of open and closed questions, emphasizing the use of those questions to clear up any ambiguities in the library user's responses. Once the need had been properly determined, Katz then suggested determining the "level of service" necessary to properly meet the library user's needs. In other words, should the librarian direct the library user to the source, take them over to the source and show it to him, pick it up and find the answer for him, or find some middle ground among the three?

Elaine and Edward Jennerich have also published a work on the process of the reference interview (1987), designed on the premise that "All the reference desk's a stage, and the staff are merely players." The reference desk, in their view, is indeed a stage, complete with props and tools; the staff is the cast; and each

reference transaction is a "performance." In training the cast, the authors also stress nonverbal communication skills as well as verbal in helping to assess the library user's actual information needs--the necessity of being approachable; not letting nervous, distracting habits or gestures interfere with the performance; responding positively to the library user; and using open and closed questions along with paraphrasing to get to the actual need.

Unobtrusive Testing

Recent unobtrusive studies have shown a correlation between certain skills and the librarian's ability to provide the correct answer. One study identifies three important behaviors of effective reference librarians: paraphrasing, follow-up, and the use of open questions (Stephen, 1988). Librarians using these verbal communication skills were more likely to get to the real information need, and, therefore, provide the correct answer to the negotiation question. Another unobtrusive study reports that although the majority of librarians were approachable and friendly, only one out of the twelve librarians tested used any verbal negotiation skills to get to the real information need. Eleven librarians prematurely diagnosed the need, and none of the librarians used follow-up techniques during the negotiation transaction (Lea, 1988). The findings of these studies have shown a general lack of verbal communication skills at the reference desk, which are necessary for full negotiation and a correct answer.

Summary

The work of Vavrek, Rettig, and Jahoda, Braunagel and Nath have established working models of the reference process, and elaborations by King, Katz, and Elaine and Edward Jennerich have discussed some of the verbal and non-verbal skills that contribute to the successful reference transaction. Unobtrusive studies have also identified the important verbal skills necessary for reference negotiation. No recent study, however, has identified both the verbal and non-verbal skills that contribute to effective reference negotiation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

An unobtrusive study is a study conducted in a given area without the knowledge of the staff being studied. The purpose of an unobtrusive study is to gain an accurate representation of the daily habits and performance of a particular group. The data gathered from an unobtrusive study are used to find the strengths and weaknesses of a particular area, and give recommendations for future improvements.

An unobtrusive study was conducted at Orem Public Library (OPL) both to evaluate the skills of the OPL reference librarians in regards to question negotiation and to gain a representative sample of the quality of reference service provided in the area of question negotiation at the information desk.

The unobtrusive study consisted of reference negotiation interviews where full question negotiations occurred, partially occurred, or did not occur as a result of the proxy library user asking one of the 20 negotiation questions. As a consequence of this process, conclusions were drawn that determined what negotiation skills were used by OPL reference librarians and how these skills affected the accuracy of the answers given.

When the non-verbal communication skills of initial approachability, eye contact, distracting gestures, facial expressions, and posture were evaluated, only the subjective

reaction of the proxy library user was obtained. The reason for this was that these variables could not be measured objectively, but were only an indication of how the proxies perceived these skills. These subjective variables were measured in relation to the negotiation process as a whole to determine which of the variables aided in bringing about fully negotiated questions and accurate answers.

The verbal communication skills of follow-up, the initial open question, additional open questions after the initial open question, paraphrasing, premature diagnosis, and remembering were evaluated objectively by the library proxy users. The verbal skills reflected what actually occurred during the negotiation process, whereas the nonverbal skills reflected the subjective perception of the proxy library user during the negotiation process.

Population

The population consisted of nine OPL reference librarians employed by the Orem Public Library and assigned to work in a rotating schedule at the main information desk from March 7 through March 21, 1990. The OPL administration considered all OPL reference staff as being professional librarians. Two held a Masters degree (one in English and the other an M.L.I.S.), five held a Bachelors degree, one held an associate degree, and one had a high school diploma.

Data Collection Procedures

Twenty negotiation questions were prepared by the researchers in coordination with LIS 696 instructor, Marsha Broadway and OPL librarian, Xanthe Farnworth. Seven proxy library users were assigned two questions and two proxy library users were assigned three questions. Each question was asked of three different OPL librarians during the data collection period. Directly following each negotiation process, a negotiation questionnaire was filled out by the proxy library user. A total of 60 negotiation questionnaires were gathered from the proxy library users and analyzed.

A proxy library user instruction seminar was held on March 7th in order for each proxy library user to read the Proxy Instructions (Appendix A), ask questions, and understand the procedures to follow and variables to look for during the negotiation process. Any questions related to the negotiation procedure were referred to the negotiation group for clarification and proxy library users were asked to note the clarifications on the Proxy Instructions. The data were collected from March 7 through March 21, 1990. A work schedule of the OPL reference librarians was obtained and each proxy library user assigned specific times to ask negotiation questions to insure that the behavior of all of the OPL reference librarians were sampled (see Appendix E).

Instruments

The instruments used for this survey consisted of 20 negotiation questions, a negotiation questionnaire, and proxy instructions. Some of the twenty negotiation questions were adapted from the Hall study (Hall, et al., 1987) and the remainder were created by the negotiation group with the assistance of L.I.S. 696 instructor Marsha Broadway and OPL librarian, Xanthe Farnworth.

The Negotiation Questionnaire consisted of fifteen questions (see Appendix B). Questions 1-5 dealt with non-verbal communication, questions 6-11 dealt with verbal communication, and questions 12-15 dealt with the negotiation process, answer given, accuracy, and source given. Both the verbal/non-verbal communication variables were adapted from the Jennerich model (1987) dealing with the negotiation process. The variables studied were: approachability, distracting gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, relaxed posture, follow-up, open questions, paraphrasing, premature diagnosis, and remembering.

Proxy Instructions were developed by the researchers to insure that proxy library users understood what to look for and the correct procedures to follow during the negotiation process and while completing the Negotiation Questionnaire.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the analysis of OPL librarians that work at the main information desk.

Because this was an operational research study, the results can not be generalized to any other population outside of the Orem Public Library.

This study evaluated the subjective response perceived by the proxy library user to the reference negotiation skills of the OPL reference librarians only in the following non-verbal communication techniques:

1. Initial approachability of the OPL librarian.
2. Use of any distracting gestures.
3. Use of eye contact during the negotiation process.
4. Use of appropriate facial expressions.
5. Display of a relaxed posture throughout the negotiation process.

This study objectively evaluated the OPL reference librarians negotiation skills only in the following techniques:

1. Use of follow-up to insure information need was received.
2. Use of initial open question to gain further information.
3. Use of open questions throughout negotiation process.
4. Use of paraphrasing to understand need.
5. Premature diagnosis of the information need.
6. Ability to remember pertinent information.
7. Negotiation to level 2 information.
8. Negotiation to level 3 information.

Methodological Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in this study:

The negotiation questions asked to the OPL reference librarians were representative of questions that would be asked at any reference desk.

Even though some OPL librarians were aware of the study, this did not significantly affect the study.

The OPL reference librarian's performance during the data collection period would be the same as their performance at any other time.

The proxy library users properly asked negotiation questions and filled out the negotiation questionnaire accurately.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

This study examined the percentage of correct answers given to proxy library users at Orem Public Library (OPL) and the nonverbal and verbal communication skills used by reference librarians during the negotiation process. From these findings, the data were studied to determine which of these skills most affected the correctness of answers given to the proxy library user by the OPL reference library staff.

Level Reached in Negotiation Process

The first research question was: How frequently do the staff at the Orem Public Library negotiate reference questions to the real information need?

Of the 60 reference negotiations, 15 percent of the questions (nine questions) were negotiated to level one, 31.7 percent (nineteen questions) to level two, and 53.3 percent (thirty-two questions) were negotiated to level three or the real information need. A summary of level reached in the negotiation process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Level Reached in Negotiation Process

Negotiation level		
Level one	xxxxxxxxx	15%
Level two	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	31.7%
Level three	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx	53.3%

Negotiation Level by Accuracy

The second research question was: How frequently do fully negotiated questions receive correct answers?

None of the nine questions negotiated to level one received a correct or partially correct answer. Level one questions received an incorrect answer 33.3 percent of the time and no answer 66.7 percent of the time. Of the nineteen questions that were negotiated to level two, 31.6 percent received a correct answer. The thirty-two questions negotiated to level three produced the highest number of correct answers, 78.1 percent. Furthermore, of the thirty-one questions that received the correct answer, 80.6 percent were negotiated to level three. A summary of negotiation level by accuracy is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Negotiation Level by Accuracy

Negotiation level	# of questions	Correct	Partially Correct	Incorrect	No answer
Level one	9	00.0	00.0	33.3	66.7
Level two	19	31.6	42.1	15.8	10.5
Level three	32	78.1	15.6	3.1	3.1

Nonverbal Skills by Accuracy

The third question was: What verbal and nonverbal communication skills lead to correct answers? Nonverbal and verbal skills were analyzed separately. The nonverbal skills are reported in order of highest accuracy rate.

OPL librarians used eye contact that was judged comfortable by the proxy library users 90 percent of the time. Librarians using

comfortable eye contact provided the correct answer 53.7 percent of the time.

OPL librarians used relaxed posture that was judged appropriate 96.7 percent of the time. Those with appropriate relaxed posture provided the correct answer 53.4 percent of the time.

OPL librarians used facial expressions that were judged appropriate 91.7 percent of the time. Librarians using appropriate facial expressions provided the correct answer 52.7 percent of the time. Two proxy library users commented that the OPL reference librarian appeared unfriendly.

None of the OPL librarians were judged to be using distracting gestures.

OPL librarians were judged approachable 96.7 percent of the time. Approachable librarians provided the correct answer 51.7 percent of the time. A summary of nonverbal skills by accuracy is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Nonverbal Skills by Accuracy

Skill	% that lead to correct answer	% of time that skill was used
Eye contact	53.7	90
Relaxed posture	53.4	96.7
Facial expression	52.7	91.7
No distracting gestures	51.7	100
Approachable	51.7	96.7

Verbal Skills by Accuracy

Part of the third research question was: What verbal negotiation skills lead to correct answers? The verbal skills are reported in order of highest accuracy rate.

OPL librarians used additional open questions after the initial open question 46.7 percent of the time. Those who used other open questions provided the correct answer 78.6 percent of the time.

OPL librarians used follow-up skills 33.3 percent of the time. Those who used follow-up skills provided the correct answer 70 percent of the time.

OPL librarians used remembering skills 73.3 percent of the time. Those who used remembering skills provided the correct answer 59.1 percent of the time.

OPL librarians did not prematurely diagnose the information need of the proxy library patron 80 percent of the time. Those who did not prematurely diagnose provided the correct answer 58.3 percent of the time. Eight proxy library users commented that the OPL reference librarian sent them to the stacks without reaching the real information need.

OPL librarians used initial open questions 71.7 percent of the time. Those who used initial open questions provided the correct answer 58.1 percent of the time.

OPL librarians paraphrased the information need 36.7 percent of the time. Those who paraphrased provided the correct answer 54.5 percent of the time.

Interestingly, the use of any of the verbal skills produced a higher accuracy rate than the use of any of the nonverbal skills. A summary of verbal skills by accuracy is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Verbal Skills by Accuracy

Skill	% that lead to correct answer	% of time that skill was used
Other open questions	78.6	46.7
Follow-up	70.0	33.3
Remembering	59.1	73.3
No premature diagnosis	58.3	80.0
Initial open question	58.1	71.7
Paraphrase	54.5	36.7

Commentary Provided by Library Proxy Users

The three most frequent subjective comments made by the library proxy users dealt with: 1) the waiting time at the reference desk before being helped by an OPL reference librarian; 2) dependence on the Dynix computer system; 3) lack of utilization of the reference collection.

During eight different negotiation questions, various proxy library users commented that they had to wait at least five minutes before an OPL reference librarian came to the information desk to assist them. One proxy library user waited thirty minutes and then finally left without assistance.

Seven of the nine library proxy users commented that many of the OPL reference librarians relied on the Dynix system to find materials before they had even negotiated the information need to its full extent. Several times it was used without any negotiation at all.

Some proxy library users commented that a call number was given to them from the OPL librarian and the proxy library user was sent to the stacks for the information. Most of the negotiation questions were created so that they could be answered from sources in the reference collection. The negotiation research team verified that the reference collection at OPL was adequate to answer all but two questions, but proxy library users observed that the collection was not being well utilized by the OPL reference librarians.

Summary

During the analysis of the data, it was discovered that a little over half of the negotiation questions were negotiated to the real information need. When the negotiation question was negotiated to the true information need, the correct answer was given 78 percent of the time. Nonverbal communication skills were used very frequently, but these skills were not important factors in receiving a correct answer from the OPL reference librarians. The use or non-use of verbal communication skills were greater factors in determining whether the correct answer was given.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

The Orem Public Library (OPL) administration wanted to evaluate the quality of reference service being offered by their reference staff. The evaluation was conducted by the negotiation group of the winter semester 1990 Library Operations Research class. This evaluation included how often questions were negotiated by the staff, the percentage of correct answers received as compared to the level of negotiation, and the negotiation skills that lead to the correct answer.

Procedures

This study used 20 negotiation questions that were asked three times each to different librarians for a total of 60 reference negotiations. The data were collected from March 7 through March 21, 1990. Nine proxies, all members of the Winter Semester 1990 Library Operations Research Class, asked the questions of OPL reference librarians. Each proxy was assigned the specific time period and questions to ask at the information desk to ensure the widest representative sampling. The result of each reference transaction was reported by the proxy library users on the Negotiation Questionnaire. While the OPL reference staff were aware that they would be evaluated during winter semester, the

questions were asked unobtrusively. The following is a summary of the results of the study.

Results

Analysis of the data showed that 53.3 percent of the negotiation questions were negotiated to the real information need. Those questions that were fully negotiated received the correct answer 78.1 percent of the time. All the nonverbal skills were used extensively (over 90 percent of the time), however these skills were not serious indicators of receiving correct answers.

The use of verbal communication skills were more indicative of receiving correct answers. The use of open questions was found to be among the most notable factors in receiving the correct answer. Additional open questions, that is, open questions used after an initial open question, were asked 46.7 percent of the time, and lead to the correct answer 78.6 percent of the time. This verbal skill was the best indicator of the correct answer. Closely related was the use of the initial open question. Even though initial open questions were not found to be an important factor by themselves, this communication skill served as a prerequisite to additional open questions in leading to the correct answer.

OPL librarians used follow-up skills 33.3 percent of the time. Those who used follow-up skills provided the correct answer 70 percent of the time. This skill was found to be the second most useful communication skill in leading to the real information need and correct answer.

Recommendations

This study affirmed that OPL reference librarians used appropriate non-verbal communication skills almost all of the time during the negotiation process. However, improvement could be made in the verbal aspect of the negotiation process itself. Since there was a high relationship between the question being negotiated to the full information need and receiving a correct answer, it is recommended that an employee training meeting be established stressing negotiation techniques. Special emphasis should be placed on asking open questions and follow-up techniques to ensure that the real information need is discovered.

Because most of the proxy library users subjectively judged the OPL reference librarians as relying too heavily on the Dynix system during the negotiation process, it is also recommended that the reference collection be utilized to a greater extent to answer patron's questions.

Suggestions for Improving the Present Study

Problems encountered during the current study were (1) certain OPL reference librarians recognizing proxy library users; (2) uneven sampling of reference librarians due to staff switching shifts and taking days off; and (3) inadequate definition of Proxy Instructions dealing with pre-mature diagnosis. Following is a discussion of each of these problems and suggestions for improvement.

Three of the OPL reference librarians recognized certain proxy library users as being members of the Library Operations Research

Class. Because each of the questions were asked three times, some of the questions were recognized as being the proxy negotiations questions. These two factors may have influenced performance by the OPL reference librarians. Future studies might be improved by having proxies other than library students and asking the questions less than three times each.

An uneven sampling may have occurred due to OPL reference librarians switching schedules and taking days off during the data collection process. These changes were not communicated to the negotiation group when the schedule was formulated. Further studies might be improved by better communication between negotiation groups and OPL administration as to the staffing schedule.

The Proxy Instructions were inadequate in their definition of premature diagnosis. Proxy library users were to mark premature diagnosis on the Negotiation Questionnaire if the OPL reference librarian did not reach the level three or real information need. In many cases, this did not occur. Further studies might be improved by making the Proxy Instructions more clear dealing with premature diagnosis.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study has been designed to be replicated for future study. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated periodically to determine if improvements are being made in negotiating questions and retrieving correct answers. Further studies should concentrate more on the negotiation levels and

verbal communication, as these were much more significant in determining correct answers received.

APPENDIX A

Proxy Instructions

An evaluation of reference service at Orem Public Library is currently being undertaken. One aspect of this evaluation is to determine the negotiation skills used by the reference librarians at OPL and how these skills affect the accuracy of the answers to the questions. The reference librarians are aware that an evaluation will take place, but they do not know when, how, or who will be conducting it. Therefore, it is important that the librarians do not suspect that a user is a proxy or they might change their usual behavior.

During an assigned time block, March 7 through 17, nine of you will ask each assigned negotiation question three different times to three different librarians at OPL. Immediately following each reference transaction, you will complete the Negotiation Questionnaire to report the results. It is important that these forms are filled out as completely as possible, both marking the objective questions and writing in the subjective comments.

Proxy Procedures

1. As a proxy library user for the negotiation evaluation, seven of you will be given two negotiation questions, and two will be given three negotiation questions. You will ask each question on the assigned day, during the assigned block of time. This will ensure that you ask each question to three different librarians. All negotiation questions will be asked at the main reference desk. You will have three Negotiation Questionnaires attached to each question. Fill out one questionnaire each time a negotiation question is asked at the desk. The questions used for this study

are called negotiation questions and consist of three specific steps or levels.

2. Before asking each question, review the Negotiation Questionnaire to be sure that you understand what you are evaluating as the reference transaction takes place. Pay special attention to the verbal and nonverbal communication used by the librarian, as well as the amount of time taken, level of negotiation, and the answer given by the librarian. The Negotiation Questionnaires contain a brief description of the verbal and nonverbal skills to remind you as you complete the evaluation; see the definitions section that follows for more complete descriptions.

3. The negotiation questions used in this study have been specially designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the librarians in negotiating library users' information needs to a specific level before beginning to find the answer. Some of these negotiation questions have been structured so that your initial request may mislead the librarian to think that you know exactly what you want. Some are more broad and general, encouraging negotiation.

4. If the reference librarian responds to your initial request by telling you where to find the information, pointing to an area, or giving you a source, accept the help and go there or look in the source trying to find your answer. Don't spend too much time looking, but don't arouse suspicions by just walking away. Don't ask for additional help, and don't suggest other sources. In this case, indicate the source on the Negotiation Questionnaire in the blank that says "What answer did you receive?" If you find the answer in the suggested source, write the answer and indicate that you found it yourself.

5. If the librarian asks a question to which the second level question can be given, give the next level of the question. This is a bit more specific, but still not the complete information need. Follow the same procedure as with the initial question. If the librarian asks closed questions that cannot be answered logically with the next level, use common sense to answer intelligently without revealing all the information. It is important that you understand the real information need of each negotiation question so you can be flexible with the levels if needed. Accept any source or direction given by the librarian at this point, but do not provide any more information unless the librarian negotiates further. Record the answer and/or source given by the librarian if the reference interview ends at this point.

6. If the librarian negotiates to level 3, then follow through and receive the answer, writing down the information as a typical library user would.

7. If the librarian negotiates only to level 1 or 2 and gives you an answer or takes you to a source, do not offer more information or explain that this is not what you want unless the librarian uses one of the follow-up techniques, such as "Does this answer your question" or "If you need any more information, please let me know." This shows that the librarian is still interested in your information need and wants to make sure you find what you want. You can then give the next level by saying something like, "This isn't exactly what I wanted. What I really need is..."

8. Be sure you fully understand the questions on all three levels before you approach the desk so you can respond naturally with each level as the negotiation takes place.

9. Try to act as normal and natural as possible. You may paraphrase the question in your own natural language to make the transaction seem real. Do not allow the librarian to see the Negotiation Questionnaire or the paper with the question on it. You may want to jot down a few facts from the question on a scrap of paper or in a notebook which can be shown to the librarian at the right level of negotiation. This may help in verifying names, spellings, etc.

10. Do not argue or be persistent in trying to obtain an answer. Do not help or prompt the librarian with clues or suggestions unless negotiated.

11. If the librarian asks if you are part of the negotiation team, say yes, but do not offer any other information. Continue with the transaction and follow through by filling out the questionnaire.

12. When you have asked all of your questions and completed your questionnaires, return the Negotiation Questionnaires with the question sheet intact to the negotiation group. The negotiation group will then analyze the collected data for the negotiation skills and number of correct answers received. The questionnaires will then be given to the accuracy group who will analyze the accuracy as well as the consistency of answers.

Definitions

Non-verbal Communication - communication that is not verbal used by the librarian during the negotiation process. You will judge the non-verbal communication subjectively as either appropriate or inappropriate. The non-verbal communication variables that you will measure are:

Approachability - librarian's initial acknowledgment of the library user's presence through positive movement, eye

contact, facial expressions, and posture as perceived subjectively by the proxy library user during initial contact at the reference desk.

Distracting Gestures - gestures used by OPL reference librarians during negotiation process perceived by proxy library users as distracting to the negotiation process; for example: nail biting, hair twisting, pencil tapping, ear pulling, etc.

Eye Contact - librarian's ability to make and maintain eye contact that is comfortable for the proxy library user throughout the interview.

Facial Expressions - facial empathy reflecting the information need of the proxy library user with sincerity such as nodding, smiling, frowning, etc.

Relaxed Posture - body movements that lend themselves to successful reference transaction, such as slightly leaning forward and facing the proxy library user.

Verbal Communication - Communication by means of language used by reference librarian during the negotiation process which you will measure objectively. The verbal communication variables that you will measure are:

Follow-up - statement given by the OPL librarian which encourages proxy library user to indicate whether or not the provided information met the information need. Example: "Does this answer your question?" or "If you need any additional information, please let me know."

Open Question - question that allowed for dialogue that required the proxy library user to respond with more than a yes or no answer. Typically begins with what, why, how, etc.

Paraphrasing - communication technique that involves restating to the proxy library user what he or she has said to clarify potential misunderstandings.

Premature Diagnosis - assumptions made by OPL reference librarian about the proxy library user and/or the information need before the proxy library user has given all the necessary information.

Remembering - the ability of the OPL reference librarian to remember important statements during the negotiation process, such as relevant dates, time periods, names of people, places, and other pertinent information.

APPENDIX B

Negotiation Questionnaire

Date:_____ Case #_____
Time reference transaction started:_____ Ended:_____

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION - During the negotiation process, how did the OPL reference librarian perform the following non-verbal communication:

1. Approachability - (initial acknowledgement through positive movement, eye contact, smiling, facial expression, etc.).

   (1)_____ Appropriate
   (2)_____ Inappropriate Why?_____

2. Distracting Gestures - (nail biting, hair twisting, pencil tapping, ear pulling, etc.).

   (1)_____ Yes Why?_____
   (2)_____ No

3. Eye Contact - (maintain eye contact which was comfortable).

   (1)_____ Yes
   (2)_____ No Why?_____

4. Facial Expression - (showed empathy and reflected the feelings the proxy library user had about his/her information need: nodding, smiling, etc.).

   (1)_____ Appropriate
   (2)_____ Inappropriate Why?_____

5. Relaxed Posture - (slightly leaned forward or faced the patron).

   (1)_____ Appropriate
   (2)_____ Inappropriate Why?_____

VERBAL COMMUNICATION - During the negotiation process, which of the following negotiation techniques were used by the OPL librarians.

6. Follow-Up - (ie. "Does this answer your question?" or "If you need any more information, please let me know," etc.).

   (1)_____ Yes What was said?_____
   (2)_____ No

7. Initial Open Question - (initial question asked by the OPL librarian that required more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Begins with what, why,how, where, etc.).

(1)_____ Yes Was it: (1)_____ Appropriate
(2)_____ No (2)_____ Inappropriate

8. Other Open Questions - (other open questions asked by the OPL reference librarian during the negotiation process).

(1)_____ Yes
(2)_____ No

9. Paraphrasing - (restate information need to clarify potential misunderstanding).

(1)_____ Yes
(2)_____ No

10. Premature Diagnosis - (answer given or assumptions made by OPL reference librarian before full information need is given).

(1)_____ Yes Why?_____
(2)_____ No Why?_____

11. Remembering - (remember pertinent information: dates, times, names, etc.).

(1)_____ Yes
(2)_____ No

NEGOTIATION

12. What level did the OPL reference librarian reach in the negotiation process?

(1)_____ Level 1 - (introductory question)
(2)_____ Level 2 - (second stage question)
(3)_____ Level 3 - (fully negotiated)

13. What answer did you receive? - (this data will be used by the accuracy/referral group).
_____
_____

14. Do you consider the answer:

Negotiation use only

(1)_____ Correct _____
(2)_____ Partially Correct _____
(3)_____ Incorrect _____
(4)_____ No Answer or "I don't know" _____

15. What source was used - (if applicable)?_____
_____

APPENDIX C

Negotiation Questions

1. Step 1: Where is your information on the military?
   Step 2: I'm interested in Israel's army.
   Step 3: I need some statistics on strengths, manpower, and equipment for the different divisions of the military.
   Possible Answer: Statesman Yearbook, 1989-90, p. 734-35

2. Step 1: I need some information on codeine.
   Step 2: I need to know if it is habit forming?
   Step 3: I take Tylenol with codeine and want to know if I should be worried about the codeine in it.
   Possible Answer: PDR, 1989, p. 1243-44

3. Step 1: I want some information on measles.
   Step 2: It's for an oral report in my health class.
   Step 3: I need general information for a lay person.
   Possible Answer: The American Medical Association Family Medical Guide, 1987, p. 715
   The American Medical Association Encyclopedia of Medicine, 1989, p. 668-69
   The Merck Manual, Fourth Ed., 1982, p. 171-184

4. Step 1: Where can I find information on mathematics?
   Step 2: I need some information on probability.
   Step 3: I really want just a short explanation of probability theory to see if I would be interested in taking a class in it.
   Possible Answer: McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, 1982, Vol. 10. p. 816-821
   The New Illustrated Science and Invention Encyclopedia, 1988, Vol. 19, p. 2591-92 and Vol. 12, p. 1550-51
   The VRN Concise Encyclopedia of Mathematics, 1975, 578-94

5. Step 1: Is there an index to the New York Times?
   Step 2: I need information about the Nobel Peace Prize.
   Step 3: Did Martin Luther King ever receive this award and if so, when?
   Possible Answer: Yes, in 1964
   Winners: Blue Ribbon Encyclopedia of Awards, 1982, p. 619
   World Almanac, 1990, p. 345

6. Step 1: Where can I find Time and Newsweek?
   Step 2: I need articles about communism?
   Step 3: I need some information on the unification of East and West Germany.

Possible Answer: Readers Guide

7. Step 1: Where are the maps and atlases?
Step 2: I want some facts on Bangladesh.
Step 3: I need to know the current population and capital city.
Possible Answer: World Almanac, 1990 - 112,757,000
Information Please Almanac, 1990 114,700,000
World Book Encyclopedia, 1989 - 112,335,000 Capital City - Dhaka

8. Step 1: Where are your encyclopedias on physical science?
Step 2: I need information about volcanoes.
Step 3: I want to compare the different types of eruptions.
Possible Answer: McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of the Sciences and Technology, 1982, Vol. 14, p. 455
McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Geological Sciences, 1987, p. 696-97

9. Step 1: What information do you have about kidney disease?
Step 2: I need information related to nephritis.
Step 3: I want to know about the role of the creatinine clearance test in diagnosis.
Possible Answer: The Patient's Guide to Medical Tests, 1986, p. 111-112

10. Step 1: What information do you have on diabetes?
Step 2: I want information on treatment.
Step 3: I need to know about insulin administration and work in alternative medications.
Possible Answer: The American Medical Association Family Medical Guide, 1987, p. 530-31, 408
The American Medical Association Encyclopedia of Medicine, 1989, p. 594, 838
The Merck Manual, 1982, p. 1043-47

11. Step 1: Where is your music?
Step 2: I'm looking for church music.
Step 3: I need a recording of Handel's Messiah on compact disc.
Possible Answer: Call number of CD - OC2185

12. Step 1: Where are your maps?
Step 2: I need Provo/Orem map.
Step 3: I want to know the bus routes and schedules in Provo/Orem
Possible Answer: A Provo/Orem Bus Schedule

13. Step 1: Do you have any speeches by presidents?
Step 2: I want a speech by President Reagan.

Step 3: I need a speech by Reagan given in 1987 on the subject AIDS.
Possible Answer: Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1987, p. 14D

14. Step 1: Where are you Spanish Encyclopedias?
Step 2: I need a biography of a famous Spaniard.
Step 3: I need a two to three page biography (in English) of a Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso.
Possible Answer: Encyclopedia of World Art, Vol. 11, p. 322

15. Step 1: Where is your information on Israel?
Step 2: I need information on the Seven Day War?
Step 3: What year did Israel gain its independence?
Possible Answer: May 14, 1948
World Almanac, 1990, p. 512
Information Please Almanac, 1990, p. 210

16. Step 1: I need information on local plants.
Step 2: I want information on industrial plants.
Step 3: I need information on air pollution as it relates to Geneva Steel.
Possible Answer: Impact of Geneva Operations, 1988

17. Step 1: I need information on publishers.
Step 2: I want the address so I can write to them about a book I want.
Step 3: I need to know if the book Closing of the American Mind is still available to buy.
Possible Answer: Yes, it is in print.
Books in Print, 1988-89, p. 1010

18. Step 1: Where is your history section?
Step 2: I need information on the history of the United States.
Step 3: I need a copy of the U.S. Constitution.
Possible Answer: U.S. Government Manual.

19. Step 1: I want information on computers.
Step 2: I'm interested in computer companies.
Step 3: I need the phone number of the Tandy Corporation.
Possible Answer: Thomas Register, 1988, Vol. 14, p. 2748

20. Step 1: I need some information on basketball.
Step 2: I want some information on televising basketball games
Step 3: I need to know what station televised the first basketball game and what was the date.
Possible Answer: WZXBS of New York televised the game on February 28, 1940.
Famous First Facts. 1981. p. 643

APPENDIX D

QUESTION ASSIGNMENT MATRIX

Day Librarian	Hours	LIS 696 Class Members Questions Assigned
Monday		
A	10-2	David N1*, RR1*; Sheri N13, N14, RR7, R6*
B	12-6	Lynda N6, RR6; Yvonne R9
C	4-9	David N2, R1; Yvonne RR5; Jonathan N16, N18, R3; Dana RR9, N20; Sheri N14, N17, R6
Tuesday		
D	10-5	Sheri N14, R6; Thom N8, RR3; Yvonne N3, RR2
E	12-9	Thom N9, R2
F	4-9	Yvonne N4, R4, RR5
Wednesday		
A	10-2	Thom N8, N9, RR3, R2
E	12-9	Rong N5, RR10; Davis N1, RR1
D	3-9	Rong N12, R10; Jonathan N15, RR4, N16, R3; Lynda N6, RR6; Mary Ann N11, R7

Thursday

E	10-6	Lynda N7, R5; Jonathan N15, RR4; David N2, R1
F	4-9	Sheri N13, RR7; Mary Ann N10, RR8; Rong N12, RR10; Yvonne N3, RR2, R9; David N1, RR1

Friday

B	9-2	Dana N19, R8; Rong N5, RR10
E	9-2	
B	9-2	Dana RR9, N20
G	2-6	Jonathan N18; Mary Ann N10, N11, RR8, R7; N9; Thom N9, R2; Yvonne N3, N4, R4, RR2, RR5; Lynda N7, R5; Sheri N17

Saturday

F	10-2	Rong N5, RR10; Mary Ann N11, R7; Jonathan N16, N18, R3
E	10-6	Rong N12, R10
C	10-2	Dana N19, R8; Mary Ann N10, RR8
G	2-6	Dana RR9, N20; David N2, R1; Yvonne N4, R4

* N = Negotiation Question
R = Referral Question
RR = Ready Reference Question

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jahoda, Gerald, and Judith Braunagel. 1980. The Librarian and Reference Queries. New York: Academic Press.

Jahoda, Gerald, Judith Braunagel, and Herbert Nath. 1977. The Reference Process: Modules for Instruction. RQ 17 (Fall): 7-12.

Jennerich, Elaine Zaremba and Edward J. 1987. The Reference Interview as a Creative Art. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Katz, William. 1987. Introduction to Reference Work. 2 vols. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

King, Geraldine B. 1972. The Reference Interview: Open and Closed Questions. RQ 12 (Winter): 157-160.

Lea, Peter and Lotta Jackson. 1988. The Exception or the Rule? The Quality of the Reference Service in Public Libraries. Library Association Record 90 (October): 582, 585.

Rettig, James. 1978. A Theoretical Model and Definition of the Reference Process. RQ 18 (Fall): 19-29.

Stephan, Sandy, et al. 1988. Reference Breakthrough in Maryland. Public Libraries 27 (Winter): 202-203.

Taylor, Robert. 1968. Question Negotiation and Information Seeking in Libraries. College & Research Libraries 29 (May): 178-194.

Vavrek, Bernard F. 1968. A Theory of Reference Service. College & Research Libraries 29 (November): 510-512.

_____. 1974. The Nature of Reference Librarianship. RQ 13 (Spring): 214-215.

White, Marilyn Domas. 1985. Evaluation of the Reference Interview. RQ 25 (Fall): 69-75.

Whitlatch, Jo Bell. 1989. Unobtrusive Studies and the Quality of Academic Library Reference Services. College and Research Libraries 50 (March): 181-194.

Young, William F. 1985. Methods for Evaluating Reference Desk Performance. RQ 25 (Fall): 69-75.